

# Mountain Ridge Junior High School 5525 West 10400 North Highland, Utah 84003

**April 30-May 1, 2008** 



Utah State Office of Education 250 East 500 South P.O. Box 144200 Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200

## THE REPORT OF THE VISITING TEAM REVIEWING

# Mountain Ridge Junior High School

5525 West 10400 North Highland, UT 84003

**April 30-May 1, 2008** 

### **UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION**

Patti Harrington, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

## DIVISION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

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Salt Lake City, Utah

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#### **FOREWORD**

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, April 30-May 1, 2008, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Mountain Ridge Junior High School is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Paula Fugal is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Mountain Ridge Junior High School, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Mountain Ridge Junior High School.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D. State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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7/25/2007

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Rhonda Bromley	Assistant to the Superintendent(K-6 Central) Administration(7-9) Administration
Rhonda Bromley	
Rhonda Bromley	

## MOUNTAIN RIDGE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

## ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

## **School Administration**

Paula Fugal	Principal
Dr. Vallen Thomas	Assistant Principal
Dana Hill	Assistant Principal

## **Counseling**

Annette Bearden	Counselor
Boyd Hall	Counselor
Arica Sumner	Counselor

## **Support Staff (Classified Staff)**

Marla Campbell, Food Service Manager Judy Clayton, General Secretary Tom Ercanbrack, Computer Specialist Teresa Harrison, Food Services Ingrid Ivins, General Secretary Ruth Jensen, Finance Secretary Kameron Kiggins, Day Custodian Boyd Luke, Head Custodian Adam Lunt, Night Custodian Nadine Quarnberg, Media Aide Diane Sipos, Achievement Center Marilee Smith, Food Services E.J. Thornton, Registrar

## **Faculty**

Ryan Andersen	Michael Gosar	Heathe Ostler
Kelly Anstead	Jeff Hinton	Crystal Permann
Richard Bateman	Janys Hutchings	Jacque Peterson
Jennifer Bitton	Rachel Kelson	Megan Reese
Jacklyn Brande	Chris Kofoed	Brooke Rowe
Derek Brooks	Tineke Larsen	Kristie Ruesch
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Rachel Bunker	Marjorie Matheson	Sam Smith
Linda Bushman	Vicki McMurray	Thomas Stokoe
Sharon Christensen	Alissa McNaughton	Steven Stradley
Beth Chynoweth	Amy McNeill	Jessica Thomas
Whitney DeGroot	Ryan Myers	Samantha Thompson
Alicia Francom	Bobbie Newbury	Cathy Tom
Erin Glabe	Kristen Ogden	Val Walker

Courtney Ward Shelly Way Kathy Wilson (Bird) Matthew Woolley Mike Woolley Brad Woolstenhulme

Loila Wynn

#### MOUNTAIN RIDGE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

#### MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to ignite a spirit of discovery and empower our school community.

### **BELIEF STATEMENTS**

### We Believe:

- Students learn best when teachers, students, and parents are aware of national, state, and school objectives for learning.
- Students, parents, and teachers need to communicate high expectations for themselves and each other.
- Students, parents, and school staff need to be engaged in life-long learning habits.
- Students develop complex thinking skills from varied instructional styles and interdisciplinary connections.
- Students, parents, and teachers have the right to a physically and emotionally safe, non-threatening learning environment.
- Students need to develop a strong work ethic, communication skills, and a spirit of cooperation in order to contribute to the learning community and experience success.
- Collaborative efforts and shared responsibility among students, parents, and school personnel provide stronger instructional processes for students.
- The ability to communicate, think, reason, and actively participate with social and civic responsibility is critical in developing the characteristics needed for success.

### DESIRED RESULTS FOR STUDENT LEARNING (DRSLs)

## 1. Communication Skills

- 2. Thinking and Reasoning Skills
- 3. Social and Civic Responsibility

Date of visit: April 30-May 1, 2008

## MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Ben Lems, Mount Jordan Middle School, Jordan School District, Visiting Team Chairperson

Pamela Foster, Oquirrh Hills Middle School, Jordan School District
Cathy Hansen, Riverview Junior High School, Murray School District
Josh Stowers, Mapleton Junior High School, Nebo School District
Lisa Taylor, Roosevelt Junior High School, Uintah School District
Tim Thompson, Mapleton Junior High School, Nebo School District

#### VISITING TEAM REPORT

### MOUNTAIN RIDGE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Mountain Ridge Junior High School is located in Highland, Utah, at the north end of Utah County. The school was completed in January 1994. Enrollment reached a peak of 1,950 in 2001. Another junior high school was built that year, and the school was divided. Current enrollment stands at 1,260 with a very small minority population of 37 students, or three percent of the school population. Of those 37 students, 21 are Hispanic, two are Asian, three are black, three are American Indian, and seven are Pacific Islander. There is a very welcoming feeling in the building. Pictures in the offices and hallways reflect the students, their work, and the goals of the school. Mountain Ridge Junior High School is on an A/B block schedule. This provides for less transition time and gives students an opportunity to earn eight credits per year.

a) What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?

It is evident from the school's profile that students are the school's focus. Programs have been put in place to assist at-risk and low-achieving students, as well as the advanced students on the other end of the spectrum. The Achievement Center serves the school's at-risk population, consisting of both regular education and special education students. A math enrichment and tutoring program has recently been implemented to improve math test scores. Many extracurricular and enrichment opportunities exist for students who desire to explore interests or develop skills and talents. Observation and surveys revealed a need to address the issue of bullying. This led to the implementation of the Olweus Safe Schools program.

Most decisions at the school concerning programs, curriculum, and student interventions are data driven. Considerable data is included in the school's self-study. Much of the data is disaggregated and shared with staff members on a regular basis to help them develop curriculum and lesson plans suited to the students in their classes.

The school did a good job of aligning its action plan with the beliefs and DRSLs.

b) What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?

The Visiting Team recommends that the school profile be condensed and simplified to make it more user friendly for someone unfamiliar with the school.

The school profile should be a document in process and updated regularly as needed.

c) To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?

The departmental analysis reports identified areas of strength and limitations for each department. Focus group reports also identified areas of concern and recommendations for addressing those concerns. Evidence found by the Visiting Team shows that the school has adequately identified its strengths and limitations and is making efforts to address areas of concern.

## **Suggested Areas for Further Inquiry:**

- The Visiting Team recommends that the school develop common assessments and include the results of those assessments in the school's profile.
- The self-study the school produced is a very inclusive document, and although the information in the self-study is valuable information and needs to be documented, it could be simplified and made more user friendly for purposes of the accreditation process. The Visiting Team found it difficult to determine exactly what the primary focus of the school was due to the large body of information included in the self study.

# CHAPTER 2: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) TEACHING AND LEARNING STANDARDS

## Mission, Beliefs and Desired Results for Student Learning (DRSLs):

a) To what degree were the school's mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs developed and/or revised collaboratively by the school community to define a compelling purpose and vision for the school and to support student achievement?

The Visiting Team found evidence that most stakeholders were involved in the process of developing the school's mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs. However, students were left out of the process for the most part. Support of the mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs appears to be strong. The mission statement and DRSLs are posted in each classroom. Staff members were able to verbalize how the DRSLs relate to what they are teaching in the classroom. Although parents and students knew of the existence of the mission statement and

DRSLs, they were hard pressed to quote them or say how they applied to what students were learning.

b) To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's DRSLs?

The school's mission and belief statements align to address the key issues of the school and have an impact on the school's goals and policies. The Visiting Team recommends that that connection between them be made more explicit for patrons and students.

c) Describe the indicators (measures) that have been developed to assess the school's progress in assessing the DRSLs.

The school has identified five to seven indicators for each of the three DRSLs (Communication, Thinking and Reasoning, and Social and Civic Responsibility). The school has also identified several competencies and skills that all students are expected to acquire. These competencies are broken down into what students are expected to know, do, and become. The staff of Mountain Ridge Junior High School is in the process of developing school-wide rubrics to help measure student growth for each DRSL using a standard measure.

d) To what extent do the school's mission, beliefs, and DRSLs guide the procedures, policies and decisions of the school, and appear evident in the culture of the school?

The Visiting Team found that the school's leadership team is using the concepts contained within the school's mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs to guide decisions related to policies and procedures at the school. As mentioned above, the mission statement, beliefs, and DRSLs are not widely known or understood by some stakeholders, primarily patrons and students. The Visiting Team recommends that these concepts be more vigorously advertised and explained to all stakeholders.

### **Curriculum:**

a) To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards, the Utah Core Curriculum, reflecting the Utah Life Skills: A Guide to Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions for Success?

One of the strengths of Mountain Ridge Junior High School is collaboration. The Visiting Team commends both Mountain Ridge Junior High School and Alpine School District for their recognition of the need for teacher collaboration, as well as enabling the school, through the Monday early-out program, to have adequate time for collaboration. The Visiting Team is impressed with both the depth and

breadth of the collaboration process. Collaboration occurs with departments, grade levels, and focus groups, as well as (for some teachers and departments) with feeder schools and other teachers throughout the district of the same subject areas.

It is evident that the teachers at Mountain Ridge Junior High School use the Utah Core Curriculum as the foundation or first tier of their teaching. The second tier is the Alpine School District's three essential questions: What do we expect students to learn? How will we know when students are learning? and How will we respond to their needs? The third tier of their teaching is the focus on "Learning Targets" in which teachers break down the Core Curriculum into common vocabulary so that it is user-friendly for all the stakeholders in the school community. Teachers then put their learning targets into their disclosure documents, as well as into other materials for students and parents.

The Visiting Team commends Mountain Ridge Junior High School for its many and varied efforts with regard to curricula that meet state, district and school standards.

b) To what extent does the curriculum engage **all** students in inquiry, problem-solving, and higher-order thinking skills?

Mountain Ridge Junior High School does an excellent job of using a variety of teaching strategies that engage students. The Visiting Team found evidence of activities, games, field trips, direct instruction, research, inquiry-based learning, student-driven assignments and assessments, etc., that engage students in problem-solving and using higher-order thinking skills.

Mountain Ridge Junior High School also employs a multitude of programs to assist students of all academic and social levels. The Visiting Team is especially impressed with the Achievement Program for lower-achieving students, as well as the efforts within the Math Department to offer classes at many levels to better meet the needs of individual students.

The Visiting Team commends Mountain Ridge Junior High School for its seventh grade exploration curriculum, in which students have a taste of not only the typical TLC classes but also foreign language and speech/drama. Electives for eighth and ninth grade are just as varied, and include band, choir, orchestra (at many levels), photography, ceramics, creative writing, drama, peer leadership, foreign language, yearbook, and child development, among others. Students have many opportunities to be in classes that fit their academic level as well as their interests.

c) To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's DRSLs?

With the implementation of the D.E.A.R./Husky Den program, there is evidence that Mountain Ridge Junior High School is diligently working toward implementing the school's DRSLs. The students are aware and able to articulate that one of the school's main areas of focus is respect for self and others. The Visiting Team commends Mountain Ridge Junior High School for the Husky Den student representatives and the ongoing training they have received, and that those students are responsible to teach the lessons and objectives to their peers. The Visiting Team also commends the school in that the Husky Den/D.E.A.R. program's lessons are done throughout the school by each teacher on the same day to ensure that all students are receiving the same instruction. The Visiting Team further commends the school for using the information received from the students in Dr. Fugal's locker. This information is used to guide many of the discussions in the Husky Den meetings. This shows the school's continued efforts to keep the students at the focus and to listen to their needs and concerns.

The Visiting Team recommends that the administration of Mountain Ridge Junior High School employ ongoing training for all staff members on the new programs that goes beyond the initial training of the program to ensure ongoing success, teacher buy-in and continued feedback for all programs from all stakeholders.

The Visiting Team also recommends that the teachers and administrators educate the students on what the DRSLs are so that the students know exactly what the school wants them to have learned by the time they leave the school. Students should know what this school's DRSLs are and what a DRSL is.

d) How does the staff use assessments to drive curriculum to ensure that **all** students can reach the intended learning outcomes?

Mountain Ridge Junior High School is doing a commendable job of collecting data, as evidenced by the school's self-study. A staff member has been hired for the purpose of collecting, disaggregating and distributing data. The Visiting Team commends Mountain Ridge Junior High School for posting the data in the commons area for parents and students to see how they are excelling beyond the state and district averages.

The Visiting Team recommends that Mountain Ridge Junior High School use the data collected to drive curriculum decisions and instruction to further meet the needs of all students.

### **Instruction:**

a) To what extent do teachers use a variety of instructional strategies to enhance student learning?

Mountain Ridge Junior High School does an excellent job of using a variety of teaching strategies that engage students. The Visiting Team found evidence of activities, games, field trips, direct instruction, research, inquiry-based learning, student-driven assignments assessments, etc., that engage students to problemsolve and use higher-order thinking skills. It was evident to the Visiting Team, however, that some departments are relying heavily on the traditional lecture method of teaching; it is recommend that those departments look closely at their teaching strategies and work to incorporate best practices and multiple strategies to pique students' interest and increase learning.

It is evident to the Visiting Team that Mountain Ridge Junior High School is beginning to implement a greater use of technology in the classroom. The Visiting Team commends the staff members in the Media Center for their commitment to a multi-platform computer lab available to students. While the Visiting Team saw a variety of technologies used throughout the school, the Visiting Team recommends that Mountain Ridge Junior High School put a greater emphasis on computer technologies in non-technology classrooms. Some of these technologies could include teacher voice enhancement systems, Smart Boards, and projectors, as well as assignments in which students use technology to enhance and extend their learning.

b) To what extent have the school and the staff developed strategies for instruction that build the capacity for explicitly teaching the identified DRSL in every classroom?

The Visiting Team commends Mountain Ridge Junior High School for the many programs it has in place to teach students the DRSLs, especially the D.E.A.R./Husky Den Program, the Husky Watch, and the Peer Leadership Team. The Visiting Team recommends working toward continuing to develop these programs, working through the issues that may arise and adjusting the programs as needed. The Visiting Team feels that these programs are valuable and that, if emphasized, they will become an integral part of the school.

c) To what extent is the school's professional development program guided by identified instructional needs, and how does it provide opportunities for teachers to develop and improve their instructional strategies that support student learning?

Mountain Ridge Junior High School commends the administration and staff for ongoing emphasis on professional development in the areas of both academics and character education. The Visiting Team commends the administration for its support of teachers who wish to improve their own education and skills, and for searching out professional development opportunities for the staff. The faculty and staff of Mountain Ridge Junior High School are encouraged and provided with opportunities to attend professional development workshops and conferences.

It is evident, however, that not all teachers at Mountain Ridge Junior High School are taking advantage of professional development opportunities. The Visiting Team recommends that all teachers take advantage of opportunities to learn current teaching practices and increase their technology skills.

d) To what extent are teachers proficient in their content area, knowledgeable about current research on effective instructional approaches, and reflective on their own practices?

The teachers and staff at Mountain Ridge Junior High School are very proficient in their content areas, and are working well to learn about current research and best practices. Most of the teachers self-reflect and are diligent in keeping up with current teaching strategies. The Visiting Team recommends that all teachers evaluate their lessons and teaching frequently, and adjust their teaching based upon the needs of the current population of students instead of relying on what they have done for many years. It is evident to the Visiting Team that most teachers have continued to move forward with their teaching practices, but the team has also seen evidence of teachers who are stagnant in their practices.

e) To what extent does the school effectively implement a well-defined plan for the integration of technology into its curriculum, instruction, and assessments?

As previously mentioned, the Visiting Team saw evidence of emerging technological practices at Mountain Ridge Junior High School. Many of the teachers have embraced technology and are currently working toward implementing technology into the classroom. The Visiting Team recommends that technology be implemented in greater depth throughout the school in a variety of ways.

#### **Assessment:**

a) To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments with performance standards based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?

Within departmental teams, the staff of Mountain Ridge Junior High School is developing classroom and common assessments based on Utah State Core Curriculum Standards. A variety of assessments are being designed to address multiple learning styles. The Visiting Team observed instances and evidences of students being assessed through projects, presentations, portfolios, and traditional formative and summative assessments. The staff is to be commended for its efforts in this area, and is encouraged to continue using this data to improve student learning.

b) To what extent does the school have a process to fairly and equitably assess school-wide and individual progress in achieving academic expectations?

Mountain Ridge Junior High School has a designated Data Specialist who has been trained to access information from the school's grading program, state tests, national tests, and other sources. This data is used to create reports designed to inform both the administration and faculty of student progress. In turn, the information is used to identify students who need additional remediation to reach the academic goals of the student and school. For example, students who have a GPA of 1.0 or lower and earned low State CRT scores are enrolled in the Achievement Center. In this class, students are given the opportunity to work individually with support staff members on the classwork they are struggling with. This has allowed the staff to identify students who may not otherwise have been identified by teachers as needing additional help.

c) To what extent does the professional staff use data to assess the success of the school in achieving its academic expectations?

Mountain Ridge Junior High School has access to and is continually using data from a variety of sources to work toward achieving its academic expectations. Teachers, on the whole, effectively use the district grading software to record and track student progress. This data is available to each student's teachers, so that they are able to work together to help individual students.

Teachers are in the early stages of creating common assessments within their departments. The Visiting Team recommends that the teachers use the data from these assessments to monitor concepts that may need to be revisited and to share this data with other teachers in the department. Use of this data in identifying strengths of each teacher's current curriculum will allow the department to draw out best practices and implement them into the curriculum.

d) To what extent does the school's professional development program allow for opportunities for teachers to collaborate in developing a broad range of student assessment strategies?

The Visiting Team found that Mountain Ridge Junior High School is effectively using the early-out Monday collaboration time implemented by Alpine School District to create departmental benchmarks and assessment tools to evaluate student learning. Teachers meet in departments, and occasionally with teachers from neighboring schools, to identify areas of needed improvement. A wide variety of assessment tools appropriate for the various subjects are being used to evaluate a wide range of learning styles.

e) To what extent is there organizational agreement on the use of a school-wide scoring tool to assess the identified DRSLs?

The staff of Mountain Ridge Junior High School is in the process of developing an assessment rubric to measure the performance of the indicated DRSLs. Specific indicators and competencies have been identified and are being used to create this rubric. This process will be carried out by a focus group selected from the faculty and administration.

#### **CHAPTER 3: NAAS SUPPORT STANDARDS**

## **Leadership and Organization:**

a) To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate that actively supports teaching and learning?

The leadership at Mountain Ridge Junior High School recognizes the importance of an academic learning climate, and has worked to limit disruptions in classrooms, provide equipment needs for the classroom, and encourage teachers to participate in professional development.

Mountain Ridge Junior High School limits classroom disruptions by having a scheduled time for announcements. The school also has office assistants who walk to a classroom and deliver notes to let a teacher know if a student is needed or is being checked out of school.

Many teachers told the Visiting Team that if there is a need for equipment of any kind in a classroom, they only have to ask. The administration will ask whether the equipment is to help improve student learning. If the teacher can show that it will do so, the administration will find a way to get the needed item for the classroom. Teachers say that the administration is very supportive of their needs.

The faculty at Mountain Ridge Junior High School continually participates in professional development opportunities. The whole faculty has been trained in the Olweus Bullying Prevention program. The school identified that there was a bullying problem because the school feeds into two different high schools. The faculty and staff were trained in how to help prevent bullying from happening. The leadership team, faculty, parents, and students have all commented on how this has helped. The faculty also spends three days in the summer in professional development classes.

The Visiting Team found that the Mountain Ridge Junior High School leadership does promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate that actively supports teaching and learning.

b) To what extent does the school leadership employ effective decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and collaborative to monitor progress in student achievement and instructional effectiveness?

Mountain Ridge Junior High School has an effective decision-making process based on data, research, and collaboration.

A member of the Mountain Ridge Junior High School faculty is their Data Specialist. The leadership team or teachers can ask the Data Specialist for information pertaining to students. The Data Specialist can create reports that focus on individual students, classes, or the whole school. These reports are then used to help make decisions that benefit the students.

The Mountain Ridge Junior High School faculty meets together in Professional Learning Communities. These Professional Learning Communities are collaborative teams that meet every Monday (early-out day). These collaborative teams meet one week in focus groups or grade level teams, one week in cluster teams, and the remaining weeks in departmental teams.

The Visiting Team commends Mountain Ridge Junior High School for its efforts in using data and collaboration within their school to improve student learning.

c) To what extent does the leadership provide skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and allocation and use of resources at the school for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment which aligns with the school goals, DRSLs, and school improvement?

Mountain Ridge Junior High School's leadership team has created an environment where the faculty and staff can approach the leadership team with recommendations, ideas, or classroom needs, and know that they will be fulfilled if they will improve student learning.

d) To what extent does the school leadership empower the entire school community and encourage commitment, participation, collaboration, and shared responsibility for student learning through meaningful roles in the decision-making process?

The school leadership has empowered all the shareholders to participate, collaborate, and share in school responsibility for student learning.

The School Community Council met with the Visiting Team and acknowledged that not only did they feel listened to, but that they have given suggestions that have been implemented in the school. For example, the Community Council suggested that there be a peer leadership team, and the Mountain Ridge Junior High School's leadership team saw the value of the suggestion and implemented it in the school.

Departmental teams met with the Visiting Team and said that they felt involved with some of the decisions that are made at the school. For example, when Mountain Ridge Junior High School was considering going to a block schedule, a team of teachers was given the task of researching and visiting schools that had moved to a block schedule. The other teachers were given information the proposed change. After receiving all the information and being given opportunities for input, the team of teachers said that they would support whatever decision was made by the administration.

The Visiting Team found that Mountain Ridge Junior High School and its leadership team have done a great job getting teachers and the community involved and letting them have a voice. Teachers have sometimes felt that they could have been more involved with the inception of ideas, instead of merely having them implemented after group discussion. The Visiting Team also found that some students feel that their voices have not been heard.

e) To what extent has the school established a formal system through which each student has an adult staff member who knows the student well and assists the student in achieving the school-wide expectations for student learning?

Mountain Ridge Junior High School has seen a need to assist students who struggle. The school has created and improved an Achievement Center for students who have failing grades and have done poorly on the CRT assessments. There was a concern that students who fall in the "C" range weren't receiving assistance. Upon investigation, the counselors were well aware of these students. They also acknowledged that teachers are available before and after school to provide extra needed help. The Visiting Team talked to other students who felt that if they needed help there were many places they could go.

The Visiting Team also found other programs to help students reach their full potential. There are math classes where students meet every day—instead of every other day, as in most classes in a traditional block schedule. There are also co-taught classes where students can receive addition instruction if they are struggling with the material.

Mountain Ridge Junior High School is doing an excellent job of meeting the needs of their students. The school has many programs designed to reach individual students and help them succeed in their education.

## **School Services:**

This standard is dealt with in the school's NAAS Annual Report, which requires specific responses and information regarding student support services, guidance services, health

services, library information services, special education services, and family and community services.

## **Facilities and Finances:**

This standard is addressed in the school's annual report to NAAS, which requires specific responses regarding the physical plant, finances, audit of school records, advertising, etc.

### **CHAPTER 4: NAAS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STANDARD**

## **Culture of Continual Improvement:**

a) To what extent has the school developed and implemented a comprehensive school improvement plan using Collaborating for Student Achievement, the Utah accreditation/school improvement process that is reviewed and revised on an ongoing basis?

When the school began its accreditation process seven years ago, the faculty formed cross-curricular teams for the first time to address the requirements for the focus groups. The Visiting Team witnessed that collaboration has become a part of Mountain Ridge Junior High School, and not just something the school does because it has to. The faculty and staff meet in cross-curricular teams regularly, from once a month to once a term, to discuss issues that relate directly and indirectly to the focus group NSSE rubric topics.

They also meet monthly as departments within the school—and, for departments with single members (such as the media specialist and the Life Skills teacher), with other schools within the district—to collaborate on skills and strategies that best support student learning, such as developing benchmarks, scope and sequence standards, and common assessments.

The school's current improvement plan contains 63 different action steps divided among three DRSLs, one academic focus, and two focus group NSSE rubric topics. The Visiting Team is satisfied that this plan is regularly reviewed and revised. The school reports that it has met about 45 of these action steps at this time, and plans to continue in these activities indefinitely.

b) To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through an aligned and ongoing professional development plan focused on the school's goals for improvement?

Mountain Ridge Junior High School offers many professional development opportunities throughout the year. The faculty has recently participated in training on such programs as UTIPS, Instructional Architect, and the Olweus Bullying Prevention program. However, the Visiting Team found evidence that understanding of the long-term goals of the school's professional development efforts was limited. Some members of the faculty, though very willing and eager to participate in training, do not understand the overall direction that the school is trying to pursue with these trainings. Also, several staff members expressed the feeling that they are not receiving enough follow-up and support during the implementation process.

c) To what extent is the new/revised school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up and is there sufficient commitment to the action plan, school-wide and system-wide?

The Visiting Team acknowledges that Mountain Ridge Junior High School fosters an understanding of the change process, supports the work of individuals and groups responsible for implementing school improvement initiatives, and sustains the commitment to continuous improvement and renewal. The Visiting Team recommends, however, that the school community identify a unifying focus for all staff development for a specified period of time that can be clearly communicated to all teachers and stakeholders. The diverse nature of the training that has been provided over the past year or two has led to some discouragement and minimal effectiveness in sustaining a new program, because teachers do not have a sufficient understanding of the school's long-term goals related to their training.

d) To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?

The administration at Mountain Ridge Junior High School is very committed to the students and prioritizes their needs over all other concerns. They are very willing to consider suggestions from the faculty and staff for productive change that supports student learning. However, broad input from all stakeholders about newly proposed policies is not always effectively gathered before implementation.

e) What significant progress has been made in implementing the original action plan since the last full visit?

The Mountain Ridge Junior High School has developed an extensive action plan on which the school has made significant progress. The original action plan has been significantly modified to include information about who does what, when, and how, in compliance with the recommendations from their last full visit. The action plan has also been modified to better align with the school's DRSLs.

f) What significant progress has the school made in addressing the **major** recommendations of the previous Visiting Team and/or review team?

The previous Visiting Team recommended aligning staff development with the school improvement plan. While the current Visiting Team sees good coordination between the school improvement plan and staff development, we recommend that more effort be given to providing adequate follow-up and ongoing support to teachers to help them effectively implement and sustain new programs.

#### **CHAPTER 5: COMMUNITY BUILDING**

*To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships* within\_the school?

This school goes to great lengths to nurture many collaborative connections between all parties within the school community. The Visiting Team would suggest that collaboration is a strength of Mountain Ridge Junior High School. There are various team configurations that regularly meet and work together, such as grade level teams, departments, cross-curricular teams, a critical friends group (which studies student work and assessments), target team (which studies assessment development and benchmarks), cluster teams (elective teachers meet together and also work with their counterparts at other Alpine junior high schools) ongoing focus groups, and school improvement groups. Talking to various members of these teams and study groups, the Visiting Team feels there is substantial evidence that the school's stakeholders work together in multiple ways to improve the school as a learning community. The Husky Den representatives and the Student Council, including the student body and class officers, are both effective, vocal student groups that are involved in the school learning process.

b) To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?

Mountain Ridge Junior High School works in multiple ways to involve parents as partners in the learning community. The School Community Council represents parents well, with bright, articulate parents who are dedicated to supporting the school learning environment. They meet regularly as a group and individually with the principal and others at the school to provide feedback and offer help and suggestions for school improvement. The PTSA is a very strong group of able parents who stay involved to help and support school issues and needs. Studentled parent conferences are held at the school twice each year, which increases family involvement with student learning. Communication flows continually from school to home through PTSA monthly newsletters, as well as a calling system that makes phone calls to every home inviting parents to school activities, to

individual SEOP meetings with school counselors, or to view new information and complete surveys on the school website.

The school also has business partners and business connections in the community that have proven very valuable. Mountain Ridge Junior High School participates in various service activities each year, such as fundraisers for struggling families, collecting donations for the Food Bank, donations of blankets and books to the Women's Center, and a community-wide 5K run involving families.

c) To what extent has the school engaged the school community in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?

The School Community Council and the PTSA groups have been directly involved in the school self-study in an ongoing way. Parents, teachers, staff members, counselors, administrators, and a few students have all directly participated in the focus groups, which have continued to meet since the last accreditation team visit. All of the school teams and groups that meet weekly, monthly or yearly have discussed and worked on all the major elements of the self-study, and continue to work on this developing document to improve the school learning community.

d) How are results of school improvement identified, documented, used, and communicated to **all** stakeholders?

This school excels in data compilation and communication of data results. The work of the school and district data specialists is extensive and is shared with all school stakeholders in multiple ways. Data results are shared with individual teachers, with all the various teacher teams, with the school Community Council and PTSA, and with the community as a whole in newsletters and on the website. It would be a challenge to come up with any additional ways in which this information could be shared. It is posted on bulletin boards in the front hall for students to digest. This data is used by all school and community stakeholders to change existing programs and create new ones, such as the Achievement Center and the Husky Den representatives. The Visiting Team recognizes the connection between data, ongoing school improvement, and the actual work that is currently going on in the school.

## CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

## **Commendations:**

- The Visiting Team commends the administration for its support of the staff and its positive professional relationship with students, parents, and the community.
- Staff members are very supportive of each other and work well together, as evidenced by their collaborative efforts. The Visiting Team commends the school for the positive climate this creates.
- The Visiting Team recognizes that the school and leadership team made a sincere effort to do a thorough analysis of the school's strengths and limitations, and commends them for this effort.
- The Visiting Team commends the staff for the great strides being made in collecting and disaggregating data and using this data to drive decisions affecting student achievement at all levels (i.e., individual student, classroom, school).
- The school is to be commended for putting students first. It was evident to the Visiting Team during the visit that students are the focus of the school, and that decisions are based on what is best for the kids.
- The Visiting Team commends the custodial staff for a well maintained and clean facility.

## **Recommendations:**

- The Visiting Team recognizes the tremendous effort that went into compiling the school profile and self-study, and recommends that the staff consider ways to simplify the document and make it more user-friendly.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the staff continue its efforts to collect and analyze school-wide classroom and individual student data and develop common assessments that can be used for self-reflection and curriculum development.
- The Visiting Team recommends increased emphasis in the classroom on making more explicit connections between the curriculum and the DRSLs.
- The Visiting Team recommends that the school continue to find innovative ways to involve all stakeholders, including students, in the self-study process and to sustain that involvement from year to year.